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ABSTRACT

Employee development programs (EDPs) are workplace adult education programs which focus on encouraging personal growth and improving confidence and self-esteem through the provision of leisure-based programs. EDPs are determined by employee needs, offered free of charge, and conducted outside working hours. EDPs were first implemented in the United States as part of the collective bargaining agreement between the United Automobile and Aeronautical Workers and the Ford Motor Company. EDPs are now being offered to employees in the United Kingdom and Australia as well. This article focuses on two EDP programs in Australia: the Geelong program and the Yarraville program. Benefits of the EDPs to the companies include the following: improved morale and team working; greater commitment from employees to the company; improved industrial relations; lower labor turnover, absenteeism, and stress; more positive attitude toward change; creation of a culture of learning within the organization; and improved effectiveness of job-related training. The EDPs provided employees with the following benefits: improved confidence and self-esteem; renewed or new interest in learning; reduction in stress; and improved life and career prospects. Programs may be delivered in various ways ranging from "taster" workshops to 4- to 6-week introductory programs. Some of the courses that were offered in response to employee surveys included first aid for the home, introduction to computers and the Internet, low-fat cooking, and machine sewing. (MN)

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Employee Development Programs: A Lateral Look at Workplace Learning

By Ann McKenzie, Project Officer, and Robyn Hodge, Education Officer, ARIS.

In 1998 an innovative adult education program was established under the combined auspices of the Blackwood Street Neighbourhood House and the Yarraville Community Centre in Melbourne's western suburbs. Following on from successful programs developed by Geelong Adult Training & Education (GATE), the program sponsored the development of an Employee Development Program (EDP).

EDP's are workplace adult education programs which focus on encouraging personal growth, improving confidence and self esteem to workers through the provision of leisure based programs, determined by the needs of employees, which are free of charge and held outside working hours.

EDP's were first implemented in the USA as part of the collective bargaining agreement between United Automobile and Aeronautical Workers and the FORD Motor Company USA. At the time, both company executives and employees felt they were 'on the edge of the economic and social cliff' - radical times demanded radical solutions. Ford's solution was the introduction of the EDP. The program is currently offered to over four million employees in the UK. The first EDP program in Australian was established in the Geelong area and is coordinated through Geelong Adult Training & Education (GATE). The Yarraville program was developed using the model developed by GATE. (ANTA, *1998 Employee Development Programs - The Essential Guide* and ANTA, 1998 *Employee Development Programs - Final Report* : Both documents prepared by Matthew Seeary.)

Workers trying out new learning opportunities

From the development of these local and international programs, a number of benefits were identified, both in terms of employers (the company) and more directly the employees. For the company these benefits included;

- improved morale and team working
- greater commitment from employees to the company
- improved industrial relations
- lower labour turnover, absenteeism and stress
- a more positive perception by employees to change

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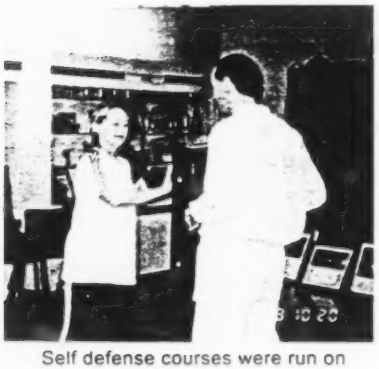
- the creation of a culture of learning within the organisation
- improved effectiveness of job related training.

For employees, there have also been a number of aspects of EDP's that have been identified as beneficial, including:

- improved confidence and self esteem
- a renewed or new interest in learning
- a reduction in stress
- improved life and career prospects.

The 1998 Yarraville project was funded by the Central Western Metropolitan Regional Council of Adult, Community and Further Education. Its aims were to investigate/research the feasibility of developing such programs in industries within the western suburbs of Melbourne, and to develop two work site EDP programs, offering general adult education courses to "non-traditional" learners. This term "non-traditional" was used to describe and target adults who, for whatever reason, would not be likely to access general adult education programs in their leisure time, and to (re)introduce them to the ideas of accessing educational programs and learning new things.



Self defense courses were run on site international

The 6 month program was planned across 6 stages, with milestones in program development documented at each stage. After research into the GATE model of EDP and the international experiences, feasibility studies were undertaken, with the development of a local industry database, it was at this stage that initial contact was made with a number of local industries. Initial contact was made with the Human Resource managers of a number of local companies including ACI, CSR, Meadowlea Foods, Don's Smallgoods, Toyota, Mobil and Pivot. Of the eleven companies who were approached, the majority were very interested in the project and wished to be kept informed of the program's progress. There were a number of factors that excluded some companies from being involved at that particular point in time. Reasons cited were: internal cutbacks due to the Asian crisis, bad timing due to the looming end of financial year, an already extended training program, and the absence of key personnel. None of the contacted companies discounted future involvement.

The third stage of the program was the negotiation and establishment of the program with 2 host companies and the formation of action groups within each of the companies. The trial programs were set up in two local industries who committed to the program. Don's Smallgoods Co Pty Ltd called their program *'Your Employee Leisure Program'* (YELP). Their worksite numbered 356 employees (38% female, 62% male). The employee population constituted a fantastic diversity of language backgrounds. 57.5% of employees spoke languages from the former Yugoslav nation, only 23% of employees spoke English at home, 19.5% of employees spoke Vietnamese at home. Other language backgrounds included, Polish, Maltese, Romanian, Hungarian, Russian, Greek Italian and Chinese. The age demographic of workers was fairly evenly spread. The second program was set up at ACI Glass Packaging Spotswood: *'His & Her Employee Leisure Program'* (HELP). Of the 411 employees, 11 are female, (2.5%).

Management at these worksites endorsed the development of these leisure programs, and anticipated that positive learning experiences in programs such as these may counter perceived negative views of learning and change amongst their workers. There was also a strong feeling of wanting to "give something back" to workers, and in doing so strengthen organisational morale.

Following this came the actual program development, with many of the attendant administrative and PR requirements familiar to many adult education programs. Potential participants (employees) were surveyed (distributed via payslips), the consequent programs outlined, and formalised in terms of agreement with management, tutors were recruited and inducted, programs were publicised and enrolments were taken. Workers were given a number of opportunities to find out more information about the courses, with the project officer making herself available at different times to answer questions in the respective worksite canteens.

Programs were delivered in a variety of ways, from one off "taster" workshops to introductory programs of 4- 6 weeks. The concluding stage of the program was the course evaluations and final report submitted on behalf of the project worker, and sponsoring organisations.

Some of the courses that were offered in response to worker surveys were:

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- First Aid for the Home
- Introduction to Computers
- Low Fat Cooking
- Introduction to the Internet
- Leadlighting
- Sewing with your Machine

Self-defense courses were offered in response to demand

In both programs, the participation rate for employees was under 10%. This was comparable to similar programs run in the UK. Customer satisfaction with the courses delivered was extremely high (80%+). Importantly, the programs were very successful in attracting the 'non-traditional' learner. More than half the program participants had not done any training since leaving school, and over 40% of program participants had left school between the ages of 13 and 16. Close to half the program participants spoke a language other than English at home. It is too early yet to determine whether these courses have created a pathway for employees to further courses or other learning opportunities.

EDP's are innovative, cost effective programs, particularly where industry provides financial support or incentives to employees (especially priority groups) to pursue life-long learning. By having flexible delivery arrangements which are non-threatening and in a familiar environment programs (on site where appropriate), can attract a number of people who may not have taken part in adult learning. This project attracted a high number of 'non-traditional' learners, it is hoped that over time, many of these individuals will progress into further courses or learning opportunities. In these days of economic uncertainty, budgets are tight. The concept of leisure courses as a way of fostering and developing a culture of learning is very new to Australia and will continue to need financial support through the establishment phase.

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The ***ARIS Resources Bulletin*** is the quarterly journal of the Adult Education Resource and Information Service (ARIS). Resources are reviewed by language and literacy professionals. If you would like to be part of the review team please phone Robyn Hodge at Language Australia on (03) 9926 4779.

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Adult Education in the Community

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